

TWRA CONTINUES INCENTIVE FOR NATIVE GRASS BUFFERS

NASHVILLE --- The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency is continuing to offer a one-time incentive payment of \$75 per acre for farmers to plant native grass buffers around cropfields under a 10-year contract in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This payment makes this economically smart practice an even better deal than already exists.

The Conservation Practice-33, "Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds", allows farmers to establish 30-to-120 foot wide buffers planted to native grasses on one or more sides of eligible cropfields. As Congress has not yet passed a new Farm Bill, USDA has allowed enrollment to continue through at least March 15, 2008 for the CP-33 and other Continuous Signup buffer and small acreage practices.

"It's a smart move for many farmers to enroll unproductive field edges that lose money year after year, such as shaded edges along the woods", said NRCS biologist Mike Hansbrough. "The TWRA payment makes it even more profitable for the farmer, and provides habitat that bobwhites and rabbits utilize year-round."

Under the CP-33 contract, the USDA pays the enrollee a standard CRP annual soil rental payment, up to 50 percent cost-share for cover establishment plus an extra Practice Incentive Payment amounting to 40 percent of the establishment cost, and a one-time Signing Incentive Payment of \$100 per acre. The one-time TWRA incentive is in addition to and separate from the USDA payments. In many cases, payments received through the CRP program will greatly exceed what the landowner is currently making from crop production in these field border areas.

The practice also allows flexibility on buffer width in order to straighten out irregular field edges. Many farmers enroll the long edges of their row crop fields, parallel to their line of planting. More than 4,100 acres of buffers have been enrolled in Tennessee since 2005.

"The wider the buffer the better, as wide buffers increase the chance quail will respond to the new habitat." Hansbrough adds. "While we have several approved planting mixtures, the 'short native grass mix' is the one we're seeing provide the best cover and that has the best options for weed control."

TWRA will continue to provide the incentive for new CP-33 acres enrolled until the statewide cap of 5,000 acres is reached. To find out if you and your land are eligible for this practice, contact the Farm Service Agency office in your local USDA Service Center. For a free DVD on the CP33 practice and other information on bobwhite, quail, and native grasses, contact TWRA Private Lands Liaison Mark Gudlin at mark.gudlin@state.tn.us or (615) 781-6614.